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First report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1719 (2006) dated 25 October 2006, by which the Council established the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) and requested me to keep it regularly informed of progress in establishing the Office and in the implementation of the resolution. The report covers major developments in Burundi since 28 November 2006, including the launching of BINUB on 1 January and the status of implementation of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement, signed on 7 September 2006 by the Government of Burundi and Palipehutu-Forces nationales de libération (FNL). It also highlights the progress achieved and the remaining peace consolidation challenges.

II. Major developments on the ground

A. Conclusion of the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Burundi and the launching of the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi

2. The mandate of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) was successfully concluded on 31 December 2006. A public information campaign highlighting the achievements of the Mission was held to mark the event. As indicated in the Secretary-General's letter of 22 December 2006 (S/2006/1030), ONUB's last military contingent, the South African battalion, was re-hatted on 29 December to form the core of the African Union Special Task Force to support the implementation of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement.

3. The liquidation of ONUB has also proceeded smoothly, with most of the assets of ONUB already having been transferred to BINUB as at 30 April. As planned, the liquidation of ONUB is expected to have been completed by 30 June.

4. BINUB was formally established on 1 January 2007. The transition from ONUB to BINUB was well coordinated and involved all concerned Departments, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, the Government and other partners. A sensitization campaign led by my Executive Representative for Burundi,

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Mr. Youssef Mahmoud, helped to familiarize senior Government officials, national non-governmental organizations, the media, civil society and international partners with the mandate and functions of the Office. In a ceremony held on 20 February, President Pierre Nkurunziza and my Executive Representative for Burundi formally inaugurated BINUB.

5. In close coordination with the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the Government and other stakeholders, BINUB has focused, during its initial phase, on the establishment of an overall structure to ensure a cohesive United Nations approach to peace consolidation in Burundi. This has included the development of a United Nations integrated peace consolidation support strategy for the period 2007-2008, incorporating the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2005-2007. The support strategy, which was endorsed by the Government on 16 March, provides the overall framework for the activities of the United Nations system in Burundi, which have a direct bearing on peace consolidation during the immediate post-conflict phase.

6. Within this framework, joint thematic programmes in the areas of peace and governance, security sector reform and small arms and human rights and justice are also currently being finalized. These joint programmes aim to deliver targeted peace consolidation support to enable the Office to meet the benchmarks outlined in the addendum to the report of the Secretary-General of 14 August 2006 (S/2006/429/Add.1).

B. Political developments

7. The heightened political tensions that characterized the last months of 2006 were somewhat reduced during the reporting period. While the situation remains tenuous, the Government has, since January, taken a number of corrective steps aimed at promoting greater dialogue and enhancing social cohesion.

8. On 15 January, the Supreme Court of Burundi acquitted the former transitional President, Mr. Domitien Ndayizeye, former transitional Vice-President Mr. Alphonse-Marie Kadege and three others detained since August 2006 in connection with an alleged coup plot. However, two other detainees on the same charges were convicted, despite the lack of evidence to support the plot allegations. They have since appealed against the verdict. The release of former President Ndayizeye and those acquitted was considered by national and international observers as a victory for the rule of law in Burundi.

9. Relations between the Government and the media also improved following the acquittal and release, on 4 January, of three journalists who had been accused of threatening national security. During the reporting period, President Nkurunziza and members of his Government met on numerous occasions with media representatives, with both sides expressing a desire for better cooperation. Two civil society representatives arrested for criticizing the Government were also released in January, including the president of an anti-corruption watchdog organization.

10. In January, in reaction to an independent audit report commissioned at the request of the World Bank, the Minister of Planning and National Reconstruction, Dieudonné Ngowembona, was dismissed for his handling of the controversial sale of the presidential plane during his term as Minister of Finance. President

Nkurunziza also issued a decree establishing an investigative commission to review the conclusions of the audit report.

11. The Government took additional steps towards ending corruption and improving economic governance, including ending existing monopolies for the distribution of mass consumption commodities such as sugar. It also began applying public financial management principles and procedures. In this regard, oversight for the disbursement of salaries of Government employees in the security sector was repatriated to the Ministry of Finance in February.

12. There have been significant developments within the ruling Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD) party. In late December, the membership of the party met in Gitega province and adopted recommendations to enhance transparency and accountability within the party. A steering committee tasked with preparing the party's participation in the 2010 elections was also established.

13. Subsequently, an estimated 1,400 party members reportedly signed a petition requesting that an extraordinary CNDD-FDD congress be convened to discuss the party's direction and leadership. This triggered an intense internal debate between those who supported and those who were opposed to the party President, Hussein Radjabu. Despite Mr. Radjabu's protests, a CNDD-FDD extraordinary congress was held on 7 February. The outcome of the congress led to the reorganization of the party's structure and the appointment of the Burundian Ambassador to Kenya, Jérémie Ngendakumana, as the party's new President. President Nkurunziza was named as the head of the party's oversight body, known as the "Council of the Wise", while Mr. Radjabu was named a member.

14. Mr. Radjabu subsequently challenged the legality of the congress, which he did not attend. On 16 February, supporters of Mr. Radjabu in Parliament called on the Supreme Court to invalidate the congress, a case which the Supreme Court dismissed on 6 April after several hearings. On 7 March, some 21 CNDD-FDD members of Parliament left the CNDD-FDD parliamentary group in support of Mr. Radjabu, thus deepening the rift within the ruling party and depriving it of an absolute majority in parliament. On 27 April, Mr. Radjabu's parliamentary immunity was lifted and he was detained on charges of threatening national security, reportedly on the basis of evidence provided to the Attorney General. As at 30 April, Mr. Radjabu remained in custody.

15. Since February, many high-level officials reportedly associated with Mr. Radjabu have also been replaced. In addition to some members of the party's leadership, this has included the Second Vice-President, the President of the National Assembly and the Second Vice-President of the Senate. The Minister of Planning, Communication and Information and the Minister of Commerce and Industry were also replaced. The changes further affected some heads of public corporations and municipal leaders.

16. In the meantime, the former Second Vice-President, Alice Nzomukunda, returned to Burundi after six months in exile. She has since been reinstated as a Member of Parliament and was elected on 25 April as the First Vice-President of the National Assembly.

17. The removal of Mr. Radjabu and his followers was considered a positive development by opposition parties, civil society and human rights groups. The

stated commitment of the new CNDD-FDD leadership to improving governance standards, including through fighting corruption, establishing a constructive political dialogue with opposition parties and establishing a better relationship with the media and civil society has also been welcomed.

18. Civil society organizations have, however, expressed some concern over the direct impact on the representation of women resulting from the changes within the ruling party, given that at least three women holding high-level positions were replaced by men. The Government has acknowledged these concerns and has pledged to remedy the gender imbalance promptly, in particular within the legislative body. A debate in Parliament on the gender and ethnic balances within the Government was ongoing as of 30 April.

19. On 13 March, members of the Senate addressed a letter to President Nkurunziza highlighting constitutional irregularities that occurred during the first 18 months of his term, including the lack of respect for political balance within the executive branch of the Government as prescribed by the Constitution. The Presidency agreed to respond promptly to the issues raised in the Senate's letter. In this context, several political parties called for a Government reshuffle, which would reflect the constitutional power-sharing arrangements.

C. Regional dimension

20. There have been positive developments at the regional level. During the second summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region held in December in Nairobi, the 11 core countries signed the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region. The Pact includes: 10 protocols; 4 programmes of action in the areas of peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development and humanitarian and social issues; a special fund for reconstruction and development; and a regional follow-up mechanism. Burundi's candidacy to host the regional executive secretariat for the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region was also endorsed during the summit, and preparations were initiated following the arrival in Bujumbura of the Executive Secretary of the Conference, Ms. Liberata Mulamula (United Republic of Tanzania). The first post-Conference ministerial meeting is scheduled to take place in Bujumbura from 3 to 5 May.

21. The Government also continued to work towards achieving full membership in the East African Community, following the decision taken during the eighth summit of Heads of State of the Community in Dar-es-Salaam in November 2006. Burundi is expected to become a full member of the Community in July 2007.

22. In the meantime, Burundi hosted a number of important regional meetings, including of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Economic Commission for Africa; the Tripartite Plus Commission, as well as a ministerial-level meeting to revive the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, which was comprised of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and which has been inactive for 13 years owing to conflicts in the region.

23. The Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries is expected to enhance regional cooperation in identified priority areas, including peace and security, democracy and good governance and economic development. The

European Union has pledged 50 million euros (€) to support the launch of the Community. A follow-up meeting is expected to be held in Bujumbura in September.

III. Security situation

24. The overall security situation in Burundi has continued to improve. In March, the United Nations reviewed the situation in the western provinces of Bubanza, Cibitoke and Bujumbura Rural, and subsequently downgraded the security from phase 4 to phase 3. Regular reviews of the security situation will continue in order to ensure that adequate security arrangements are in place for all United Nations personnel in Burundi.

25. Despite the overall improvement, criminality remained high throughout the national territory, including, in some instances, against staff of international non-governmental organizations. Murders, theft and rape were prevalent, with some allegedly committed by members of the national security forces. The high number of small arms and grenades in circulation remained a grave security concern, along with the continued illicit movement of arms across Burundi's porous borders. In spite of the Government's efforts to proceed with the civilian disarmament programme, there has been no improvement in this area since my last report.

IV. Activities related to the Peacebuilding Commission

26. There were significant developments with regard to the consideration of the situation in Burundi by the Peacebuilding Commission during the reporting period. In December, the Commission's second country-specific meeting supported the recommendation of an allocation of the Peacebuilding Fund to Burundi. I subsequently approved an allocation of $35 million for Burundi, based on the Government's peacebuilding priority plan. The joint Government-BINUB peacebuilding steering committee has since been developing project proposals to be funded from the Peacebuilding Fund, in coordination with national and international partners.

27. The steering committee approved two projects aimed at the establishment of a national independent human rights commission and the enhancement of the capacity of the National Land Commission. In support of security sector reform, the steering committee also approved two projects to enhance the capacity of the National Technical Commission for Civilian Disarmament and to support sensitization activities in advance of civilian disarmament initiatives. A fifth project will support the rehabilitation of the barracks of the Forces de défense nationale (FDN) in 14 locations. The completion of this project will allow the FDN to re-group its members away from population centres, strengthen the integration process and enhance command, control and discipline. It will also enable a more secure system of storing weapons.

28. In late March, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support visited Burundi in advance of a visit of a delegation of the Peacebuilding Commission from 11 to 14 April. The eight-member delegation from the Commission was led by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, in his capacity as chair of the country-specific configuration on Burundi.

and included representatives from Angola, Croatia, Egypt, India, Jamaica, Norway, Pakistan and Uganda. The delegation met with the President of Burundi, the first Vice-President, the President of the Senate, the President of the National Assembly, cabinet ministers, representatives of the Judiciary, multilateral and bilateral partners, representatives of all political parties, regional organizations and a wide range of civil society and private sector organizations. The visit helped the members of the Commission to gain a first-hand understanding of the peace consolidation challenges facing Burundi and to discuss the broad outline of a strategic framework for peace consolidation to be adopted by the Government of Burundi and the Commission.

29. As requested by the Peacebuilding Commission, BINUB is supporting the Government and the Peacebuilding Commission in the development of a strategic framework for peacebuilding, which will serve as the basis for the Commission's longer-term engagement with Burundi and provide a clear delineation of the commitment, roles and responsibilities of all national and international actors involved. The framework, which will be based on existing peace consolidation policy and strategies, will complement the role of BINUB in ensuring greater coordination and coherence of international assistance to Burundi on the ground. On 27 April, the Minister of Good Governance presented the first draft of the framework during an informal country-specific meeting of the Commission on Burundi. The framework is expected to be finalized in June, at which time it would be formally adopted by the Commission.

30. As part of the process of developing the strategic framework, the Commission held an informal thematic meeting in March to discuss good governance in Burundi. Additional meetings, focusing on other peacebuilding areas of priority, notably community recovery, rule of law and security sector reform, are expected to be held in late May.

V. Peace consolidation: progress and remaining challenges

A. Ending the conflict: implementation of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement

31. The implementation of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement remained stalled, despite some steps forward during the reporting period. In December, the South African Facilitation of the peace process organized a meeting in Dar-es-Salaam, at which the two parties reached an agreement on the issue of provisional immunity for FNL members and the release of detained FNL members who were nominated to participate in the agreement's Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism provided for in the agreement.

32. Other steps taken in December towards the implementation of the agreement included the operationalization of the African Union's Special Task Force, with the support of the United Nations, and the arrival in Burundi of the Chairman of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, Brigadier-General M. E. Phako (South Africa).

33. Following the Government's release of six FNL prisoners on 18 February, the South African Facilitator accompanied 17 FNL members to Burundi to participate in the work of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. On 19 February, the

Facilitator chaired the first meeting of the Monitoring Mechanism with the participation of representatives from both parties, the regional technical team, the African Union and BINUB. The members of the Monitoring Mechanism agreed on its priorities, namely the identification of suitable assembly area sites for FNL combatants and the establishment of a joint liaison team to address the issue of political and war prisoners.

34. The work of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism was disrupted, however, on 22 February, when the Government accused FNL of violating the ceasefire in an incident in Bujumbura that led to the murder of two officers of the Burundi National Police. The Monitoring Mechanism dispatched a fact-finding mission to the site of the incident, accompanied by the Ministers of External Relations and International Cooperation; Justice; the Interior and Public Security; and Defence and Veterans' Affairs and including my Executive Representative and members of the diplomatic corps. A subsequent joint examination of the facts could not determine FNL's involvement. The Monitoring Mechanism resumed work on 28 February and established a standing committee to investigate all alleged ceasefire violations.

35. Regrettably, very little progress was achieved in subsequent meetings of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. On 27 March, the Monitoring Mechanism suspended its activities following preconditions put forward by the FNL representatives. These included the negotiation of a forces technical agreement and the disengagement of FDN from provinces where FNL combatants may assemble. The FNL representatives also requested that the Monitoring Mechanism discuss the modalities of the inclusion of the movement in national institutions before the disarmament and demobilization of FNL combatants could commence.

36. In an effort to end the impasse, the South African Facilitation team met with President Nkurunziza and the FNL leadership in early April. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of the agreement. President Nkurunziza also expressed his readiness to accommodate members of FNL within the national institutions, including by nominating its members to non-elected technical and diplomatic posts in the Government. While both sides agreed that a meeting between President Nkurunziza and FNL leader Agathon Rwasa would help build confidence and pave the way for the resumption of the implementation of the agreement, they were not able to agree on a venue for this meeting. The Monitoring Mechanism remained suspended as of 30 April.

37. In the meantime, the stalled implementation of the agreement has resulted in a rise in FNL activities over the most recent period, including increased recruitment in Bubanza, Cibitoke and Bujumbura Rural provinces. Exactions against the population attributed to the FNL, such as looting, extortion, ambushes, kidnappings and robbery, are still taking place. FNL combatants were also reportedly conducting law and order activities in some areas. The national security forces have continued to arrest and detain individuals accused of FNL membership or collaboration.

B. Demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration and reform of the security sector

38. During the reporting period, the Executive Secretariat of the National Commission for Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration demobilized 886

members of the FDN, both non-commissioned officers and troops, including 223 with disabilities. The total number of combatants demobilized since the inception of the programme in December 2004 is 22,688, including 494 women and 3,041 minors.

39. With support from the Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, BINUB and the South African Facilitation, the necessary preparations have been made for the Executive Secretariat to carry out the demobilization of FNL combatants once the implementation of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement resumes. These preparations have included the development of a comprehensive disarmament and demobilization joint operations plan for the consideration of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

40. Progress was also achieved with regard to alleged FNL combatants whom the Government had housed at a site in Randa since April 2006. The Government issued a decree establishing a mechanism for combatant status verification, designed to process this group of combatants, some of whom are considered to have deserted the FNL of Agathon Rwasa and others to be associated with the faction of the movement led by Jean Bosco Sindayigaya. Following concerns raised by the World Bank, the Executive Secretariat made efforts to ensure that the decree did not violate the terms of the existing agreements between the Government, the World Bank and the Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme within the framework of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. A new decree stipulating that the mechanism had been created solely to address the Randa caseload was promulgated on 15 March 2007. This allowed the Government to proceed with the verification of combatant status of the individuals concerned, which was carried out, with BINUB's support, during the first week of April. The combatants received the first instalment of their reinsertion packages upon completion of the demobilization process on 17 April. Furthermore, the 26 minors who had been transferred from Randa to the Gitega demobilization centre in November 2006 were reunited with their families in March 2007. They will also receive the support afforded to demobilized child soldiers under the national programme.

41. With the assistance of bilateral partners, the Government has taken further steps towards reforming the security sector. The Ministry of National Defense and Veterans' Affairs carried out a comprehensive review of administrative and human resource structures within the Ministry and FDN, with support from the Government of Belgium. The Government of the Netherlands also financed the training of approximately 100 FDN officers in human resources management.

42. The challenges associated with the integration of the FDN, including the varying qualifications, training and experience of combatants, are also being addressed. The Ministry is planning to put in place a personnel management system to meet the specific needs of the integrated FDN. The establishment of such a system would also allow the Ministry and the General Chief of State to strengthen command and control over FDN as well as their financial management capacity. A census of all FDN members is also necessary which will require the appropriate financial assistance.

43. Efforts were also made to improve internal governance within the National Police of Burundi. Senior police cadres participated in a workshop jointly organized by the National Police and Belgian Technical Cooperation on the role of the police

and policing techniques in a democratic society. They unanimously identified the need to develop codes of ethics and conduct for the National Police as an urgent priority. In this connection, as part of BINUB's support to the National Police, an expert carried out an independent assessment of the function of the Inspection Générale within the National Police and presented recommendations on how to enhance its capacity. I would urge Burundi's partners to support the capacity-building efforts of the National Police in this important area.

44. Despite some progress, major challenges exist in the reform of the security sector, which continue to hinder the ability of the security services to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. In this regard, the lack of adequate training, equipment and logistical capacity severely impacts the ability of the security services to perform their daily functions.

C. Small arms

45. Within the framework of the Government's national civilian disarmament and small arms proliferation strategy, the Technical Commission for Civilian Disarmament organized a series of workshops to sensitize the media on its activities and to train its cadres and members of the security services on international and regional agreements pertaining to small arms and light weapons. During the reporting period, the Technical Commission also drew some lessons from the Arms for Development Programme managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in preparation for the implementation of the national strategy.

D. Human rights

46. While serious challenges remain, the period under review has been marked by some positive developments in the field of human rights. The promotion of human rights and the necessity to support and develop national human rights protection were issues that have figured prominently in President Nkurunziza's recent public statements.

47. On 22 December, the President issued a decree commuting all death sentences, reducing sentences for some categories of prisoners and releasing others, including elderly and terminally ill prisoners. The President also ordered the release of all prisoners whose detention violated legal procedure. In total, 2,588 prisoners were released and the sentences of 862 were reduced following implementation of the Presidential decree. However, severe overcrowding in Burundi's prisons, which hold more than twice their capacity, remains a challenge that will only be resolved through thorough reform and enhancing the capacity of the judicial and corrections sector.

48. During his visit to Burundi from 13 to 27 January, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Burundi raised several key issues with the Government, including the pending investigation into the alleged summary execution of some 30 men in Muyinga province in July and August 2006. In February, the Minister of Justice appointed a second judicial commission to complete the investigation. In a welcome move, the Minister of Defence facilitated the commission's access to military personnel implicated in the case. The judicial

commission's findings were reportedly handed over to the Minister of Justice at the end of April. Speedy prosecution of this important case would demonstrate the Government's stated commitment to improving respect for the rule of law and human rights.

49. On a less positive note, however, there was little progress in the investigations into most other allegations of serious human rights violations, especially those that occurred before the signing of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement. While allegations of human rights violations committed by military personnel have diminished since the ceasefire's entry into force, there was an increase during the reporting period of abuses allegedly committed by personnel of the National Police, including cases of torture or ill-treatment of suspects while in police custody. BINUB continued to submit and conduct systematic follow-up of all pending cases with the relevant authorities.

50. BINUB's collaboration with the Government and with civil society partners on human rights issues continued, during this period, including numerous activities promoting human rights, focusing on increasing awareness of human rights and strengthening the capacity of journalists and trade unions.

51. Activities to launch the establishment of a national independent human rights commission were launched on 20 December by the President of the Republic. Working closely with the Government, BINUB organized workshops in February and March for representatives of civil society and media professionals to explain the role, responsibilities and relevance of national human rights institutions and a national human rights commission in particular.

E. Child protection

52. During a visit to Burundi from 10 to 13 March, my Special Representative on children and armed conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, followed three issues of concern raised by the Security Council working group on children and armed conflict: (a) the recruitment and use of children by FNL; (b) the detention of minors associated with FNL; and (c) sexual violence against children, especially girls. My Special Representative met with President Nkurunziza, relevant Government ministries and donors, human rights partners, civil society and conflict-affected children.

53. My Special Representative was encouraged by the progress made by the Government, including the release of children held in prisons and police holding cells who were accused of participating in armed groups, notably FNL. She expressed the hope that the remaining 22 children at Mpimba prison on similar charges would be released as soon as possible. She also welcomed the family reunification of 26 children held at the Gitega demobilization centre prior to her visit. She further stressed that all children associated with armed groups, whether remaining within the FNL ranks, detained in prisons or recently released, must receive full support in reintegrating themselves into society.

F. Judicial reform

54. A revised draft criminal code was analysed and approved by the Government and is currently before Parliament for adoption. The revised draft code proposes important changes, including the abolition of the death penalty and the criminalization of torture, as well as new provisions for the protection of women against sexual violence and the protection of children. It also includes provisions regarding the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Burundi will now have universal competence to prosecute these crimes, which are not subject to a statute of limitation and are excluded from amnesty, but not from presidential grace.

55. A first draft of the revised national code of criminal procedure has been prepared by a task force of Burundian experts, with the support of BINUB, to bring it in line with international human rights treaties ratified by Burundi. The draft will now be discussed at several thematic workshops with members of Parliament, Government officials, civil society representatives, legal practitioners, diplomatic representatives and BINUB experts, in order to ensure its broad endorsement.

G. Transitional justice

56. At the request of the Government, a United Nations technical team, which included representatives of the Office of Legal Affairs, OHCHR, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and BINUB, conducted discussions with the Government from 5 to 10 March to clarify outstanding issues relating to the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms. The outstanding issues are: the nature of the national consultation process prior to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the non-applicability of amnesty for the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes; the relationship between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Tribunal; and the independence of the prosecutor. Both sides came close to a common understanding regarding the nature, scope and role of the Government of Burundi, the participation of the United Nations, civil society organizations and the people of Burundi in a broad-based national consultation process. The issue of amnesty, the linkages between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Tribunal and the independence of the prosecutor will require further dialogue between the United Nations and the Government.

H. Refugee returns

57. The first quarter of 2007 has been characterized by a very low level of return of Burundian refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania, with only 2,912 refugees returning between 1 January and 30 April. This is in sharp contrast to the surge in returns following the signing of the comprehensive ceasefire agreement last September. The current uncertain political and security situation arising from the deadlock in the agreement's implementation could be a significant factor discouraging refugees from returning. A difficult humanitarian and economic situation and the lack of food and seeds in Burundi may also have deterred returns between January and April. Consequently, the Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has revised its planning, and now estimates 65,000 instead of 80,000 returnees during the course of 2007.

58. In the meantime, the authorities of the United Republic of Tanzania have continued to expel Burundians they consider to be illegal immigrants, although BINUB has established that many of the expelled were long-term residents who had not applied for refugee status through UNHCR. Many have reportedly been arrested in the villages where they had settled and there are numerous reports of serious ill-treatment by Tanzanian officials prior to their expulsion.

I. Humanitarian situation

59. The humanitarian situation was exacerbated by torrential rains at the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007, which had a detrimental impact on the food supply during the reporting period. On 20 December, the Government set up a solidarity fund to support affected populations in the provinces of Muramvya, Bubanza, Karuzi, Kayanza, Cibitoke, Ngozi and Ruyigi for a period of four months, until 30 April. A steering committee chaired by the Minister of the Interior and Public Security was also established to coordinate planning and the Government's response to the crisis.

60. From 19 to 20 December, representatives from the United Nations Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with provincial authorities, carried out a rapid joint evaluation to assess the situation in Gitega and Ngozi provinces. Findings revealed that basic subsistence crops, including beans, maize, rice, sweet potatoes and vegetables, were the most affected.

61. As a consequence, overall food production dropped by about 3 per cent from the already very low production levels, resulting in the steep rise in basic food commodity prices. Furthermore, the limited availability of bean seeds will have a severely negative effect on the next crop season, due to be harvested in June.

62. Specialized international agencies focused their initial response on sanitation and prevention of epidemics, distributing kits containing non-food items to affected households in Bujumbura Rural and Cibitoke provinces. For its part, the Government reinforced the capacity of health centres in the vicinity of the flooded areas, providing additional drugs and mosquito nets. Thus far, these efforts seem to have produced positive results and an outbreak of epidemics has been avoided. Most humanitarian activities in February and March focused on the preparation for the second planting season. WFP distributed food rations to approximately 60,000 households in six of the most vulnerable provinces. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, FAO and non-governmental organizations provided seeds and tools to more than 345,000 households throughout the country.

63. On 31 January, a $131.6 million Consolidated Appeal Process for Burundi was launched. Thus far, the total amount received for 2007 is $47 million for contributions and commitments, and $29 million for uncommitted pledges. I encourage donors to contribute generously to the Appeal. These urgently needed resources will contribute significantly to the consolidation of peace in Burundi.

J. Socio-economic development

64. Despite delays, preparations for Burundi's round-table donors' conference are ongoing and the event is now scheduled to take place in Bujumbura on 24 and 25 May. The criteria for determining priority areas for funding have been largely addressed by the Ministry of Planning, in coordination with donors and all stakeholders, before presentation of the documentation for the round table to the Government for its review and endorsement.

65. During the reporting period, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continued to support the recovery and peace consolidation process. On 7 March, the President of the World Bank visited Burundi to assess the Bank's projects. In his meetings with Government officials, private sector representatives and civil society, the President reiterated the Bank's commitment to supporting Burundi, while encouraging the Government to adopt measures to eradicate corruption. In this regard, he also announced that the Bank would provide some $180 million to finance five projects in support of good governance.

66. The IMF, which recently appointed a resident representative in Burundi, announced the disbursement of $10.7 million in the context of a poverty reduction and growth facility arrangement.

67. Burundi's bilateral partners also remained actively engaged in the country's peace consolidation efforts, which led to a number of high-level bilateral visits during the reporting period, aimed at enhancing cooperation and promoting development partnerships.

68. In the meantime, the action plan for the national poverty reduction strategy paper was finalized and endorsed by the Government on 11 April. In this regard, it is estimated that for the period 2007-2010, the Government will require $640.9 million to finance development activities, of which $247.8 million is required for budgetary support.

VI. Observations

69. During the course of 2006, the nascent democratic process in Burundi faced major challenges. Tensions between the Government and political parties, the media and civil society, reports of widespread corruption and serious human rights abuses, in particular those committed by the national security services, threatened to undermine the painstaking efforts of Burundians to build solid foundations for sustainable peace and development.

70. While the overall situation remains fragile, I am encouraged by a number of promising steps that President Nkurunziza and his Government have taken since the beginning of the year. The improvement in relations with the media and civil society, the commitment to improve the human rights situation and fight corruption and the pledge of the ruling party's new leadership to work in an inclusive and cooperative spirit with all political parties are welcome developments.

71. It is essential therefore that the Government and its national partners continue to engage in dialogue as they address the challenges that will inevitably arise in the peace consolidation process. By addressing obstacles to peace transparently and within the framework of the law, Burundian leaders can ensure that progress made

to date will not be compromised. Pressing ahead with governance reforms will be a key factor in that regard, along with an inclusive exchange among political parties and sustained support for the development of the capacities of civil society and the media.

72. The proactive and positive engagement of the Government of Burundi at the regional level is also encouraging. The revival of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries and Burundi's formal accession to the East African Community in July should further advance regional integration and provide important development opportunities for Burundi and its neighbours. I commend the Government and people of Burundi for hosting the new Executive Secretariat of the Great Lakes Conference and the Government's commitment to the ratification of the Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region at the next parliamentary session.

73. The Government's engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission thus far also contributes to the consolidation of peace in the country. It is my hope that once adopted by the Government and the Peacebuilding Commission, the strategic framework will serve as an effective platform for partnership and sustained support to strengthen peace in Burundi.

74. The people of Burundi have high expectations for immediate peace dividends. This includes tangible improvements in basic social services and infrastructure, as well as a reduction in human rights abuses committed by security sector personnel. The Government's efforts to deliver basic services remain hampered by the lack of resources and limited capacities. The authorities should therefore redouble their efforts to ensure effective and transparent economic governance. In this context, the Peacebuilding Commission should continue to play an active advocacy role in mobilizing resources for Burundi and helping to ensure the success of the upcoming donor round table. I urge Burundi's international development partners to assist in creating the institutional capacities needed to enable the Government to put the resources provided by donors to the best use.

75. As mentioned above, despite the progress achieved, the country continues to face enormous challenges. The current impasse in implementing the comprehensive ceasefire agreement is of particular concern. It is essential that this final phase of the peace process be successfully concluded without delay so that all Burundians can focus on the urgent national reconciliation and reconstruction tasks that lie ahead. The genuine goodwill of all concerned will be required to bring this about.

76. The Government's stated commitment to moving this process forward and its intention to accommodate FNL demands are commendable. I hope the Government of Burundi will continue to explore further political and other incentives that would build confidence and end the current impasse. For its part, I strongly urge the FNL leadership to respect its obligations and to immediately move forward with the implementation of the agreement.

77. The efforts of the Regional Peace Initiative for Burundi, the South African Facilitation of the peace process and the African Union have been instrumental in helping the Burundian parties carry the peace process forward. While the onus clearly remains on the Burundian parties to ensure that their efforts to consolidate peace are not wasted, international engagement will remain essential in order to bring closure to the recovery and peace consolidation phase. The United Nations

will continue to actively support all constructive measures in this regard, in particular those that address the root causes of the conflict.

78. A solid foundation for stability in Burundi will require, inter alia, significant progress in the area of security sector reform, including the focused and sustained provision of adequate training and equipment, and ensuring civilian control of the armed forces. The Burundi National Police should also be provided with the necessary resources to fulfil its responsibilities for internal security. Training on human rights standards for the Burundi security services is also an essential element for the future national stability of the country. However, an end to the serious human rights abuses committed by some members of these services can only be achieved through determined efforts and concrete measures by the Government to eliminate the culture of impunity.

79. Durable peace will also depend on how Burundians reconcile themselves with the consequences of their tragic past and forge a shared future. It is hoped that a common understanding between the Government and the United Nations can soon be reached on the issues outlined in paragraph 56 above. This would allow the United Nations to continue the negotiations with the Government on a legal framework for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Tribunal, based on the highest standards of justice and international human rights. The United Nations will pursue a principled but constructive and pragmatic engagement towards that end. The forthcoming visit to Burundi of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights may facilitate progress in that area.

80. In conclusion, I would like to express appreciation to my Executive Representative for Burundi, Youssef Mahmoud, and all BINUB personnel for their work in support of consolidating peace in Burundi. My appreciation also goes to all United Nations personnel, non-governmental organizations and bilateral and multilateral donors for their generous contributions to the cause of peace in that country.